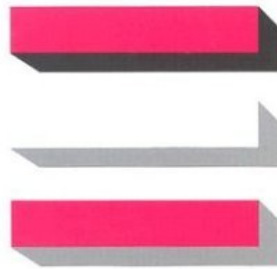


"... WHAT WE HAVE HERE IS PERHAPS THE BEST SHORT  
INTRODUCTION TO ANARCHISM THERE IS."—NEW STATESMAN

# Anarchism



Daniel Guérin

Introduction by Noam Chomsky

## Anarchism

*Daniel Guérin , Noam Chomsky (introduction)*

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**Anarchism** Daniel Guérin , Noam Chomsky (introduction)

“One of the ablest leaders and writers of the French New Left describes the two realms of ‘anarchism’—its intellectual substance, and its actual practice through the Bolshevik Revolution, the Spanish Civil War, the Italian Factory Councils, and finally the role in workers’ self-management in Yugoslavia and Algeria... An important contemporary definition of New Left aims and their possible directions in the future.”

—Publishers Weekly

## Anarchism Details

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# From Reader Review Anarchism for online ebook

## Alejandro Núñez baladrón says

Impassioned defense of anarchism, recommended as an introduction on the topic, prior to the reading of the 19th century classics. However, the author is so committed to the cause, so emotionally invested, and much of the descriptions of self-management are so stainlessly positive that the doubt remains on the objectivity of the analyses, and the suspicion persists of a excessively biased collection and interpretations of facts and sources.

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## J.M. Hushour says

Largely a rehash of just the sorts of polemics that tend to make anarchism, the classical political framework, not your stupid friend's anarchism, annoying. The best and most practical political idea that has failed utterly anytime anyone has ever tried it, anarchism doesn't really get the respect it should but Guerin's admirable attempt is nice. he gets bogged down though in attempts to define it and explore its evolution through the multiple polemical miasmas that it went through and the situationally lame gos folks had at it, especially in Spain where it was doomed from the beginning. A better approach might be to simply discuss the notion itself, its relevance to the modern world (a la Kropotkin) and theorize whimsically about how you could bring it about (basically everyone pitching in and giving the finger to the government, yay...) If you think sharing is satanic and the frank expression of emotions like love and compassion make you weak, better avoid this one.

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## Adam says

Guerin tirelessly investigates and advocates for a socialism that is “free” and built from the bottom-up; in other words, anarchism. In the preface, Chomsky quotes Rudlof Rocker to further define anarchism, as opposed to so-called “authoritarian” socialism: “Anarchism is necessarily anti-capitalist in that it 'opposes the exploitation of man by man.' But anarchism also opposes 'the dominion of man over man.' It insists that 'socialism will be free or it will not be at all'” (xii).

This book is appealing because it is a broad survey of the topic, and covers many of anarchism's important thinkers, but isn't bogged down with biographical details, like many of the other books on the topic. Instead, Guerin focuses on the range of ideas contained within anarchism. For example, he shows the tension between the individual and the collective (a point that would be interesting to compare alongside Negri's conception of the “multitude”).

Another interesting theme is the relationship between revolutionaries and “the masses.” Of course, anarchists do not believe in a vanguard of revolutionaries to lead “the masses.” But while anarchists view the activism of both as necessary to revolution, Guerin notes that there is not a satisfactory theory for their synthesis: “Relations between the masses and the conscious minority constitute a problem to which no full solution has been found....and one on which it seems that the last word has not yet been said” (38).

Guerin argues that far from being utopian, anarchism is highly constructive, and reviews a number of

considerations that go into visioning anarchist society: organization, trade, self-management, competition, and degree of socialization. To prove his point, Guerin highlights anarchist planning and practice at various times and places, including early 20th century Italian Worker Councils and revolutionary-era Spain (the darling and poster child for most anarchists!). Here, as elsewhere in the book, Guerin's sympathy for Bakunin and syndicalist anarchism is revealed. The Italian example is fascinating, in which unions established workplace councils that fought for managerial control of production through direct actions. In this way, some regarded these worker organizations as a “prefiguration of socialist society” (110).

The Spanish example is the most widely referenced by anarchists, though this is the first account that I've read. This Spanish experience contains some notable features. First, the two-headed stronghold of the movement: one industrial; one rural. The result was two divergent anarchist forms, the former being more syndicalist (organized by trade unions) and the latter more communalist (drawing from local villages' traditions). The enormous union membership and the dissemination of propaganda in rural areas well prepared workers and peasants for self-management of their economic affairs after the revolution. Perhaps the most important feature of the Spanish anarchism was the economic primacy of the revolution. Instead of attempting to seize political power, the workers and peasants seized economic power, through direct action. Guerin argues that this is attributable in part to the lessons learned from the Russian Revolution, and the tragedy that the Soviet state became.

For me, the most interesting discussion to be drawn from Guerin's work is the revolutionary potential of unions today. Guerin's historical examples show the integral role unions played in the achievement of workers' self-management. Also, what are the possibilities for Italian-style worker councils in today's workplaces? Do today's workers' experiments in “pre-majority” unionism plant the seeds for liberating other institutions in broader society?

This is highly recommended for those interested in an introductory reading on anarchism, particularly its syndicalist form.

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### **Mikhail Tillman says**

The book was concise and very well organised. Guerin seems to work against himself at certain points though, contradicting his views on several issues. For me, the book served a purpose counterproductive to the author's intent. It made clear the need for a centralised socialist state (though not on the Russian model) rather than convince me otherwise. For instance, Guerin claims that "human nature" was the cause of ruin of the Spanish communes, claiming that due to lack of organisation the selfish proletariat participating took what they could in a mad grab; whereas the anarchists put forth regulatory safeguards to prevent this from happening. His terminology here seems to be flipped, because the so called "authoritarian socialists" would be the party instituting these preventive regulations. All in all, the book was good for understanding anarchist ideology, but didn't put forth a convincing argument.

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### **Nargiz says**

Natural order

“Proudhon was the first to proclaim that anarchism is not disorder but order, is the natural order in contrast to

the artificial order imposed from above, is true unity as against the false unity brought about by constraint.”

The book gives a good glimpse on the theoretical anarchism and its practical application. The first two parts describe the basic concepts in anarchism and debates between its theorists. Guérin argues about the practical application of anarchism in Russian, Italy, and Spanish revolutions, which became the flagship of late XIX and early XX centuries. Self management is the central concept that the author stresses. Guerin also assesses revolutionary movements in three countries through the prism of how effectively they would be able to organize self management in agriculture and industry. The author makes final remarks about the misunderstanding and mostly misinterpretation of the anarchist ideas in the mid of XX century, as in historical perspective anarchism became a synonym of chaos and disorder.

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### **Bitty Navarro says**

Daniel Guérin's introduction to Anarchism is, by far, the best book to start learning about the complexities of anarchist thought and the realities of anarchist practice during the XXth century. It is also great for those of us who want to refresh our knowledge of anarchism and to help pinpoint what anarchist author or what type of anarchist thought to read next, to add to our knowledge of anarchism. As Guérin points out, a lot of anarchists stick to reading —or misreading— the fathers of anarchism —such as Bakunin and Proudhon. Anarchism is still alive and, nowadays, it's more relevant than it has been for the past sixty or seventy years. Guérin not only puts anarchist thought and practice in perspective, admitting to the calumnies and outright attacks to destroy anarchist thought and practice by the authoritarian marxist-inspired left, but he also leaves a very important question open: with neoliberalism in decay and authoritarian leftist governments proven to be fascist in their treatment of the individual and their creation of a centralised parties willing to suppress all thought that differs to them with violent and military methods, what follows? Will anarchism become a new apolitical, economical option? Will it become a social upheaving? Will it be the next, so to speak, statu quo?

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### **Jesse says**

Informative but oddly obsessed with Soviet state socialism. Not that that stuff isn't really interesting, but I really wanted to get more thoroughly into an overview of anarchist theory and follow it up with examples of that in practice, and the baffle of Soviet repression became a third issue I hadn't expected. Nonetheless an interesting and informative read, albeit pretty dry.

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### **Marshall says**

A painfully dry theory and history of libertarian socialism, or anarcho-syndicalism. I still can't figure out if the two are synonymous, and I don't understand why a book on such a specific topic was given such a generic name. There are so many things this book did not help me understand, which it did not make up for by what it did help me understand, that anarcho-syndicalism isn't actually about eliminating government, but replacing a large-scale state with a collection of small-scale "worker councils" governed by direct democracy. How these councils interact, how conflicts are resolved, how crime is policed, and how to defend against international attacks was not even addressed in this book, much less answered. Most of the book is spent contrasting anarchism with communism, which is necessary because they are in fact so similar. The

history it provides seemed to demonstrate how impractical anarchism has proven to be, as all attempts at it have degenerated into authoritative, centralized state socialism. Even the one "success," the Spanish Revolution indicated this tendency in its short life.

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## **Andrew Vidal says**

Seriously, more people ought to read this great introduction to anarchist thought and see that it's not a philosophy or a belief in chaos and destruction. After reading this book, one might find that it's more about creating a society that is based around voluntary cooperation, as opposed to coercion, a society based on mutual aid and freedom, a society without hierarchical domination--as opposed to the competitive drive for profit fostered by capitalism.

Daniel Guerin also provides a historical context for the various branches of anarchism--from its individualist strains to the emergence anarcho-syndicalism--and illustrates the role of anarchists during the tumult of the twentieth century. I particularly found his exposition of the Spanish Civil War interesting and useful.

If that's enough reason to read this book, one might do well to notice that Noam Chomsky has written its introduction. I cannot recommend this book enough for its honest delineation of anarchist thought.

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## **Nic Don says**

Guerin defines anarchism somewhat narrowly along syndicalist lines, and shows a particular dependence on Proudhon and Bakunin. Also, it goes without saying that, published in 1970, some aspects of the book's analysis are dated. Nevertheless, this is a helpful introduction to anarchist economic and political thought. The section on history is particularly useful, disentangling several lines of post-French Revolutionary radical action, particularly the contradictory nature of the early days of the Russian Revolution and in Lenin's early development.

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## **Jake says**

Well admittedly when I read this book it was mostly review. That being said I found the theory section (first 70 pages) pretty weak. The practice half (second 70 pages), called "Anarchism in revolutionary practice," was much better, but mostly because the events covered speak for themselves.

Guerin, for some reason incomprehensible to me, seems to have a super affinity for Proudhon. He seems to privilege Proudhon's ideas (many of which are largely considered pre-anarchist and somewhat reformist by many anarchists now-a-days) over those of his much more developed successors. Furthermore, Guerin focuses a lot a post-revolutionary programs (mostly those outlined by Proudhon) instead of looking at how the deconstructing of hierarchies and the revolutionary practice of non-hierarchical organizing can open space for a plethora of diverse programs decided and implemented from below.

The "Anarchism in revolutionary practice" section is much more agreeable. It is basically an overview in some of the more successful experiments in anarchism throughout the revolutionary period of the 20th century. Guerin does a good job of examining the "third revolution" trend that Murray Bookchin would later

identify in more depth. The idea being that revolutions often occur spontaneously from a popular discontent, followed by bottom-up organizing of the means of production by the workers themselves (factory councils, neighborhood assemblies, worker self-management) essentially driving towards the type of decentralized, stateless social organization that defines anarchism. A group of professional revolutionaries then emerges from the mix, riding popular sentiment into power (Lenin's, for instance, implemented this bait-and-switch, seeming to be a supporter of self-management and the soviet council system's that emerged quite democratically and directly after the revolution). These professional revolutionaries gradually centralize their control through the state apparatus, thus crushing the prospects of libertarian revolution.

Guerin poses some questions about how this can be avoided in the future as well as what we can learn by those brief periods of social self-organization that so often existed in the early months of revolution before the state was established.

I suggest reading this book, but substituting the first half with another introduction to anarchist theory. Perhaps the new AK text "Anarchism and its Aspirations" by Cindy Milstein.

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### **Euan Pollock says**

A phenomenal introduction to anarchist thought, clearly and carefully laying out both the theory and the history of anarchism. A book I will definitely be reading again

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### **Ryan Milbrath says**

Daniel Guerin attempts to give a brief history of anarchist theory and practice in this particular book. Written in the '60's, Guerin's book seems a bit dated. However, Guerin focuses on presenting theory and practice that is pretty timeless. From Proudhon and Bakunin to anarchist presence in the Russian and Spanish revolutions, Guerin does a great job of summarizing the general trends in anarchist thought. If Guerin's goal in writing the book was to make anarchist theory accessible to a wider audience, I believe he has succeeded. Though I would disagree with the generalizations made concerning the differences between Marxist and and libertarian socialism, I think the book does a great job of detailing the differences between the sects without splitting to many hairs.

Guerin uses the popular examples of the Russian revolution, Italian, and Spanish revolutions to examine the anarchist presence and role in these revolutions. I believe he was not critical enough of their strategy, tactics, and ability to garner support. Especially in regards to the Russian Revolution where terror tactics is only briefly discussed and the most influential anarchist movement of the time, the Narodniks, were not even mentioned. Despite the surface examination of each case study, I felt Guerin made valid points, but nothing new by today's standards.

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### **sarinrabbit says**

Said time and again: a great ABCs on Anarchism. Always a great reference for jumping-off points of specific theories and historical implementations of the ideology. Some of the most interesting material is

arguably the suppression of anarchists during the Bolshevik Revolution, all the while avoiding an overstatement of the actual anarchist involvement in the revolution. The book is a staple for classic post-1945 Anarchism, but also not of total modern/post-classical thought, with its focus on the essentials and its pragmatic clashes within the greater Left throughout history.

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**Otii says**

Perfect introduction to anarchism!

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